

BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

SATURDAY FEBRUARY 5, 2011

THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER at 9:10am by Budget Committee Chairperson Mr. Vadenais.

ROLL CALL 9:10am: Present were Mrs. Bartomioli, Mrs. Nadeau, Mr. Puccetti, Mr. Vadenais, Ms. Vallee

NEW BUSINESS:

Mr. Steven Lindberg, Ms. Fran Johannes, Ms. Christine Bonas, Mr. George Hemond, and Mrs. Donna Naradowy were present to discuss the School Committee Budget proposal for FY2012.

Superintendent Lindberg opened the meeting by explaining that the budget books are organized by critical sections and that the initial approach was “0 Balance”. The budget is expected to be online by 2-15-11.

Mr. Lindberg read through the “Goals and Overview” sheet. Budget Committee members are invited to attend a BEP meeting in Lincoln on 2-28-11.

FY2012 Draft Budget Analysis-\$20,618,255-Final Operating Budget.

Mr. Lindberg stressed that the budget is a structurally deficit number by more than \$300,000 and for 2011 the deficit is already more than \$853,000.

Overall salary increases by \$122,454.

Benefits increase is \$152,193 however this figure is an estimate-actual numbers will come in April.

Q Mr. Pucetti-Where do certified retirement and municipal retirement monies go?

A Several people attempted to respond. Ms. Irene Scripsack stated that she believes the monies go to the state fund and if we are even a day late we get a phone call re: where's the payment? 12.55% is the state rate for certified teachers. Every school department may have a different rate? The retirement Board sets the rate? THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE WILL GET BACK TO THE BUDGET COMMITTEE ON THIS.

Mr. Vadenais expressed the concern that many municipalities are not funding their pension system and wondered if North Smithfield was perhaps funding everyone else's pension system?

Mr. Lindberg suggested that the Budget Committee and/or Town Council should write a letter to the state re: pension funding. Town Council President Mr. Yazbak stated that the Town Council would be

happy to write such a letter.

Mr. Yazbak suggested that the School Committee look at unemployment insurance rates because rates are going up and might double. Ms. Lisa Marcotte stated that the School Department is self-insured for unemployment.

We reviewed the FY12 Draft Budget Analysis with the following discussion:

- Salary Obligations increase by \$122,454.**
- Benefit Obligations increase by \$152,193.**
- Operational Obligations increase by \$609,298.**
- The Administrative Operational Requests restored the Athletics Program as well as classroom supplies and technology improvements. Mr. Lindberg pointed out that the restored dollar amounts are not even up to what the dollar amounts were several years ago.**
- Personnel requests for salaries and fringe benefits included \$104,933 for a Diploma Coordinator, \$62,647 for a Math Specialist, \$90,383 for a Technology Integration Specialist and \$65,216 for a district wide Computer Technician. Total increase for personnel \$354,550. Mr. Lindberg pointed out that this increase would be offset by a recommended \$445,309 reduction in personnel.**

Proposed school staff reduction includes reducing personnel in the

areas of Art, Music, Library, PE, and Health. Mr. Lindberg said that it is hard to pin down the exact dollar amount of the reduction because often teachers have many certification so that the reduction of a kindergarten teacher could result in the “bumping out” of a teacher somewhere else with less seniority. The following discussion ensued:

Q: Ms. Christine Charest, Town Council Vice President-What is the total school population?

A: Mr. Lindberg-The school population is declining somewhat. We are working with the High School to take away some of the electives offered.

Q: Ms. Charest-I don't want to see losses in Music and Art where there is often only one teacher. You can't bump certifications in these specialty areas. Music, Art and Library instruction is important to the education of every child.

A: Mr. Lindberg stated that 80 plus % of the overall school budget is personnel. On paper North Smithfield has amongst the highest classroom pupil limits of 25 for K; 26 for 1st & 2nd; and 28 for grades 3-12.

A: Mr. Vadenais pointed out that actual class size is lower.

A: Mr. Lindberg advise Budget committee members to read through

the entire budget to discover actual class size for each grade.

Mr. Robert Mezzanotte, NSHS Principal advocated for the PBGR Diploma Coordinator position (\$104,933 per year):

Mr. Mezzanotte stated that the #1 priority for the High School is the hiring of the PBGR Diploma Coordinator at \$104,933 annual salary with benefits. NS has 55 areas of deficiencies. Mr. Mezzanotte stated that they are working hard to overcome the deficiencies and that “common planning time” for teachers is helping. Mr. Mezzanotte stated the need for specialists to ensure that children are getting what they need. He explained that the measure is no longer simply test scores and grades, children now need to demonstrate what they have learned. NSHS needs to “catch up” on the portfolio process, IEP, growth plans for academics/careers/social best fitting individual student strengths.

Q: Ms. Bartomioli-what skills will this PBGR person need to have?

A: Mr. Lindberg-we are being vague on purpose. We are not sure what we are looking at. For example, “cyber-bullying” is a huge issue. Students are bringing social issues into the school. The state is trying to legislate cyber bullying. In fact Senator Tassoni is hosting a meeting at NSES on 2-10-11 which I encourage you all to attend.

Mr. Eric Butash, Director of Technology, advocated for the Computer Technician position (\$65,216 per year):

Mr. Butash began by stating that the department is currently 2 persons. 5 years ago there were 400 computers and 6 servers. Today equipment includes 1200 computers, 30 servers, and 135 printers. Grant funding has helped to build a great department however 2 people cannot keep up with the maintenance requests for the infrastructure. Teachers want more technology in the classrooms.

Mr. Lindberg stated that the use of technology is key to our children's future. We need to move to the next level, we are primed to do so and we require the addition of another Computer Technician.

Q; Mr. Vadenais said that the Budget Committee has the responsibility for looking at the overall town picture, including the budget for the schools. The town is also experiencing the need for additional technology help. Would the School Committee be willing to explore the possibility of job sharing the additional Computer Technician with the town?

A: Mr. Lindberg stated that there is no way that question would be answered. The School Committee is not "selling" their budget requests on the premise that any jobs will be shared with the town.

A: Mr. Vadenais stressed the need to look "globally" at the monies the town is spending, for example there are 2 payroll clerks-one for the town and one for the schools. The efforts should be more collaborative-not "us and them".

A: Mr. Lindberg stated that there is no “us or them” from his perspective. He stated that there is no way the school department is going to assume collaborative responsibilities. Mr. Lindberg stated that he is shell-shocked. The School Committee is in trouble and has been in fiscal trouble for a long time-the answer is not through collaborative task sharing initiatives. The School Committee takes care of its own needs and is strapped to do so.

A: Ms. Charest-We need to get over “us and them”-it has never worked in the past. We need to collaborate and the collaborative effort has deteriorated during the past few years.

A: Mr. Lindberg said there has been a very bad, very ugly history for the past several years and it has taken its toll on the school budget and on the people.

Ms. Donna Stone, 2nd grade teacher at NSES, advocated for the hiring of the Technology Integration position (\$90,383 per year):

Ms. Stone stated that she uses technology in her classroom because technology creates intellectual stimulation. She has a great deal of respect for her fellow teachers whose methods are more traditional however Ms. Stone believes that education is changing and that students today are accustomed to using computers and the internet. She works hard to create educational programs that combine technology with the curriculum and her second grade students use Word, the internet, and are videotaping book reports. 100% of her

students have internet access and a classroom webpage.

Ms. Stone believes that a Technology position is necessary to help filter technology opportunities for students-there are literally hundreds of thousands to choose from on the internet. Ms. Stone stated that North Smithfield has a terrific technology infrastructure however that infrastructure is underutilized.

Q: Ms. Nadeau asked if Ms. Stone would have the expectation that all teachers would learn to utilize technology to the extent that she herself does-including those teachers whose more traditional teaching methods Ms. Stone respects?

A: Mr. Lindberg responded saying yes, technology in the classroom would be mandated for all teachers.

Q: Ms. Bartomioli asked if Ms. Stone's students hand write and learn spelling or are they dependent on spellcheck? Also what happens when they progress to 3rd grade-are they able to keep up in a more traditional classroom?

A: Ms. Stone stated that students in her classroom do everything the other classrooms do.

Q: Ms. Bartomioli stated her discomfort with second graders having email addresses particularly with the advent of cyber bullying.

A: Ms. Stone stated that the classroom webpage and email is restricted to classroom members only and that she receives copies of all emails sent by her students.

A: Mr. Lindberg stated his belief that at some point schools are going to have to introduce a “social media curriculum” with the goal of teaching students how to correctly use the internet.

Q: Ms. Vallee asked what the schools planned to do to ensure that parents would follow through with monitoring proper internet use in the home?

A: Mr. Lindberg stated that he would like to mandate parent training.

Q: Mr. Vadenais asked how successful is the Parent Portal program?

A: Mr. Butash explained that parents have instant access to grades and daily attendance for their child through the Parent Portal. Mr. Butash reported that the program is hugely successful.

Ms. Clare Arnold, Director of Curriculum Development, advocated for the Math Specialist position (\$62,647 per year):

Ms. Arnold began her remarks saying that RI has grade level expectations and that NECAP measures the success of that learning and will be tied into graduation expectations.

NSES has attained more than 90% proficiency in reading and Ms. Arnold believes that is due to the fact that the structure is in place-there are reading specialists who work with students experiencing difficulty with reading.

At the same time 3rd grade math proficiency is only 75% and it “spirals downward from there”. There is no support system in place to help students struggling with math. The focus should be at the elementary level and Ms. Arnold believes that while there is a need for 4 Math Specialists, the department is asking for only one.

This position is seen as temporary, once a support system was established the math specialist position would be phased out.

THE .5 SOCIAL WORKER POSITION (\$31,371 per year) is described as a “people services” position needed at the secondary level. This Social Worker will respond to “significant/critical incidents” to help identify the needs of children who are experiencing difficulties with social, emotional, behavioral and psychological issues.

THE PROPOSED BUDGET FOR THE CENTRAL OFFICE was presented by Ms. Irene Scripsack:

Ms. Scripsack opened her remarks by complimenting Ms. Lisa Marcotte for her hard work organizing the Chart of Accounts .

Q: Mr. Puccetti asked who imposed the requirement for the changes made to the Chart of Accounts?

A: Ms. Scripsack stated that the state imposed the requirement so that there is uniformity across the entire state.

A: Mr. Lindberg stated that the state wants greater uniformity and transparency and wants to tie this information into the BEP.

We reviewed the budget for the Central Office with discussion about Private School Transportation.

Mr. Lindberg stated that he would like to see North Smithfield collaborate with a neighboring town to negotiate a better contract for buses. The contract is up this year.

1 child takes a bus to a private school; 21 students attend Woonsocket Vocational; 2 students attend Highlander; and 14 are enrolled at Beacon Charter School.

Q: Ms. Charest asked if a transportation stipend could be offered for transportation to private schools rather than paying for buses with few students aboard?

A: Mr. Lindberg replied that private school transportation mandates utilizing the state system. NS is mandated to provide transportation

to private schools. Mr. Lindberg will ask Mr. Meo to look into other options.

THE PROPOSED BUDGET FOR NSHS was presented by Mr. Mezzanotte:

We reviewed the budget proposal for the High School noting that the funds for “extracurricular trips are for events including transportation for the Mock trial and Math Teams. Without transportation these teams cannot exist.

Funding for “NSHS Graduation” includes end of the year events which celebrate student accomplishments and recognizes these awards with certificates and plaques.

Q: Mr. Vadenais asked if the intent was basically to restore the budget?

A: Mr. Mezzanotte replied yes, and indicated that there were areas where cost reductions have been achieved.

THE PROPOSED BUDGET FOR TECHNOLOGY was presented by Mr. Butash:

We reviewed the technology budget noting that the increase to \$18,000 (from \$9,338) in the telecommunications line item is due to RIDE mandates. The increase to \$41,759 (from \$17,598) is due to the desire to install the Microsoft 2010 suite.

THE PROPOSED BUDGET FOR THE MIDDLE SCHOOL was presented by Mr. John Lahar, Middle School principal.

Mr. Lahar noted that more art classes have been added and a new level of Special Ed will be added for students coming from Halliwell in the fall.

THE PROPOSED BUDGET FOR HALLIWELL was presented by Ms. Diane Jolin, Halliwell Principal:

Ms. Jolin pointed out that her budget is small and also that there is no technology in the Halliwell budget.

Q: Mr. Vadenais asked how Halliwell was doing on their reduced budget of just \$27,000 this year?

A: Ms. Jolin replied that the students are learning, the “proof is in the pudding” and the halliwell students are doing very well.

THE PROPOSED BUDGET FOR NSES was presented without discussion by Mr. Lindberg.

THE PROPOSED BUDGET FOR CURRICULUM/PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT was presented by Ms. Arnold, Director of Curriculum/Professional Development:

Ms. Arnold stated that this budget is supplemented by monies from the state and that grants pay for 90% of the costs of Professional

development.

The budget increase of \$4,500 reflects RI's adoption of Common CORE mandating that all professional development must reflect Common CORE standards. There are new teacher evaluation systems at state level.

THE PROPOSED BUDGET FOR ATHLETICS was presented by Mr. Lindberg:

The Athletics budget proposal was reviewed with the following discussion:

Q: Ms. Bartomioli asked what was happening with the cell tower proposal for the high school?

A: Mr. Lindberg responded that the Town Council was acting on it.

A: Mr. Vadenais stated that the cell tower will not generate \$140,000 annually for the athletics program no matter where it is located.

THE PROPOSED BUDGET FOR PUPIL PERSONNEL SERVICES was presented by Rusty Brown, Pupil Personnel Director:

Mr. Brown stated that the increase of \$224,200 is due to behavioral, emotional, and psychiatric needs of children.

15-16% of the school population, approximately 342 students, receive aid through Pupil Personnel Services and that special education

needs are trending down.

THE PROPOSED BUDGET FOR MAINTENANCE was presented without discussion by Mr. Lindberg.

Mr. Vadenais is organizing a volunteer effort to rehab the large Kendall Dean meeting room.

NEXT MEETING of the Budget Committee:

Thursday February 10th at 7:00pm.

Motion to adjourn the meeting at 12:45pm was made by Ms. Bartomioli, seconded by Ms. Vallee and unanimously approved.

Minutes respectfully submitted,

Merrie Nadeau